

West San Carlos - Overall Workshop Summaries

On October 29th, 2012, over 40 community members participated in the first West San Carlos Urban Village community workshop. The workshop was the first in a series of three community outreach meetings geared towards engaging the community in the West San Carlos Urban Village planning process. Participants included neighborhood residents, property owners, and other individuals interested in gaining insight into the planning process.

The workshop began with a presentation given by staff on Urban Villages and the Urban Village planning process. At the end of the presentation, participants broke out into groups. Within the groups, participants were asked their perception of the assets within the neighborhood and the opportunities that exist. Additionally, there were discussions about a future vision for the neighborhood and the height of development along the corridor. The final task for participants was to use Lego, which represented the projected development and population growth as outlined in the Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan, to construct where they thought new development should be planned. Each table was provided with a large map of the study area and a bag of Lego. Each bag of Lego corresponded to the projected population growth and development allotted for that particular Urban Village.

Many of the workshop participants see the potential in the area but generally agree that changes need to occur. One unique feature of the area is the mid-century modern architecture and signs. Participants were generally in favor of paying homage to the mid-century modern character of the Urban Village but moving forward with new development. It was acknowledged that West San Carlos Street is in an optimal location, close to freeways, downtown and Santana Row and Valley Fair, and with the addition of the Bus Rapid Transit line, this corridor is ripe for change.

Assets in the Urban Village:

One of the first things mentioned when discussing West San Carlos is mid-century modern buildings and signs. While participants appreciate the historic nature of these structures, they also do not want them to impede future development. They would like to preserve some of the look and feel of the mid-century modern architecture but also have new development on the corridor as well. Some structures and businesses, such as the Western Appliance sign, Falafel Drive In, the Time Deli sign, and the Burbank Theater were mentioned as having particular significance.

Another asset mentioned at the workshop was the location of the West San Carlos Urban Village. Located just outside of the downtown core, West San Carlos Street is one of the main arterial roads leading to downtown San Jose, and could be considered a gateway. Additionally, the West San Carlos Urban Village is located close to a number of major freeways and to regional destinations such as Santana Row and Valley Fair Mall. The location will be further enhanced when the planned Bus Rapid Transit along the corridor will increase the Urban Village's connectivity with a number of key sites in San Jose.

Opportunities:

There are a number of businesses in the area that residents see as undesirable, particularly the adult businesses, the medical marijuana dispensaries, and the gun store. A number of these are located in unincorporated pockets and are thus not within the jurisdiction of the City of San Jose and the Urban Village planning process. There are some underutilized properties that are located in significant locations within the Urban Village that could function as nodes. For instance, the businesses circle property does have a number of vacancies and indications of lowered investment into the property. This property could be an excellent location for a new development that could anchor the rest of the Urban Village.

Although there have been some streetscape improvements in the last decade on West San Carlos, the pedestrian environment is still inhospitable. Participants mentioned that street trees, redesigned bus stops, mid-block pedestrian crossing, and street furniture would significantly enhance the pedestrian experience on both West San Carlos and Bascom Avenue.

Height:

The height of new developments is of particular concern to some of the participants. Residents in the area want to ensure that new development is well integrated into the existing urban fabric of the Urban Village. They suggested that particular attention be paid to the direct interface between new developments on the major arterials corridors that abut existing single family residences. This was a particular concern on the south side of West San Carlos as the lots are very shallow with single family residences directly to the rear of the lots. Participants were in favor of mid-rise development but opposed to high rise development. There was more support for taller buildings at key nodes within the Urban Village, such as at the intersection of West San Carlos and South Bascom.

Generally, the overriding sentiment amongst the groups was that mid-rise buildings along West San Carlos would be ideal, with more height on the north side of the street due to the depth of the lots with considerations made for adjacent existing residential properties.

Land Use:

Due to the length of the West San Carlos Street corridor, many of the workshop groups chose to focus development in the form of nodes that would act as anchors within the Urban Village. A particular node of significance that many groups chose to focus on was the intersection of West San Carlos Street and South Bascom Avenue. Some of the groups created a mixed-use office and residential development at this intersection while other groups choose to use this area for residential uses with ground floor retail.

Another trend seen amongst the workshop groups was to preserve and build upon the retail nature of the corridor but with housing built above retail establishments. Mixed-use development was the predominant land use development of choice among workshop participants. The general consensus was that this area lacks parks and open space. A number of the groups suggested that a great place for a park would be the vacant lot adjacent to the existing Buena Vista Park located at Scott Street and Menker Avenue.

Table #1

Assets:

- Time Deli building.
- Falafel Drive-In.
- The area has a 1950s feel.
- Antique stores on West San Carlos.
- Accessibility of auto repairs shops and used car lots.

Opportunities:

- Location is convenient (between Santana Row and Downtown).
- The #22 bus route.
- Burbank could be revitalized.
- The Burbank Theater could reopen and show cheap movies or second run movies.
- There needs mid-block pedestrian crossing at Safeway.
- There's an opportunity to add trees and design features on the street because there is currently no shade.
- Minimize the sound of traffic.

Heights:

- The buildings on the corridor should be five to six stories max.
- Taller buildings should be on the on east side of railroad tracks towards downtown.

Vision:

- Bike lanes along W. San Carlos.
- The addition of more parks in the area.
- There needs to be change on South Bascom.





Growth Strategy:

Table #1 chose a growth strategy that spread development throughout the corridor. While there are certain pockets where specific land uses are clustered together, their pattern of development is relatively consistent throughout the whole Urban Village. One area where growth is somewhat more intense is the intersection of West San Carlos and Bascom. In this area, the group created a residential hub with mid-rise buildings and parking structures within the development.

This group focused some of the development potential on the Bascom stretch within the Urban Village by intermixing mid-rise residential building with ground floor retail amongst parking garages. It appears the group focused office development close to the western edge of the Urban Village boundary. The exception to this is a small office development on the north west corner of the intersection of West San Carlos and Bascom.

In terms of parks and open space this group created a larger park on the north side of the street near the western boundary of the Urban Village, across from residential mid-rise buildings. There are other parks and open spaces scattered throughout the development. The heights of the buildings remain relatively even throughout the corridor.

Table #2:

Assets:

- There are a number of local businesses on the corridor.
- There are schools with ball fields and open spaces.
- Historic signs (Western Appliance).
- Existing transportation infrastructure is good.
- Services within walking distance.

Opportunities:

- Coordinate with VTA Bus Rapid Transit and Urban Village planning efforts.
- Maintain and safeguard private property rights.
- Maintain auto-related uses.
- Limit building heights.
- Remove median.

Constraints:

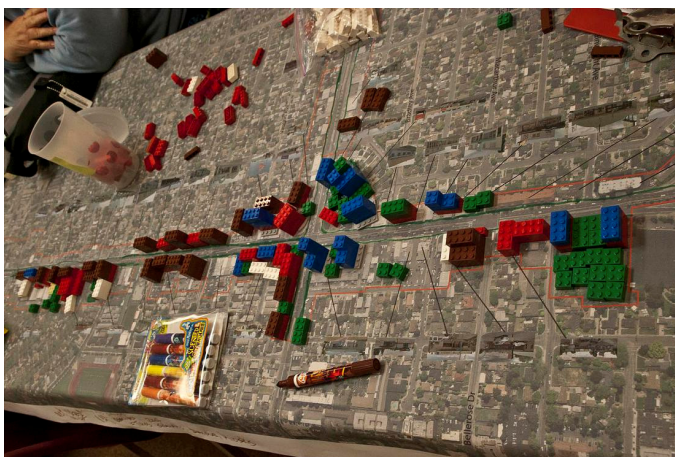
- Width of San Carlos.
- Avoid high rise development.

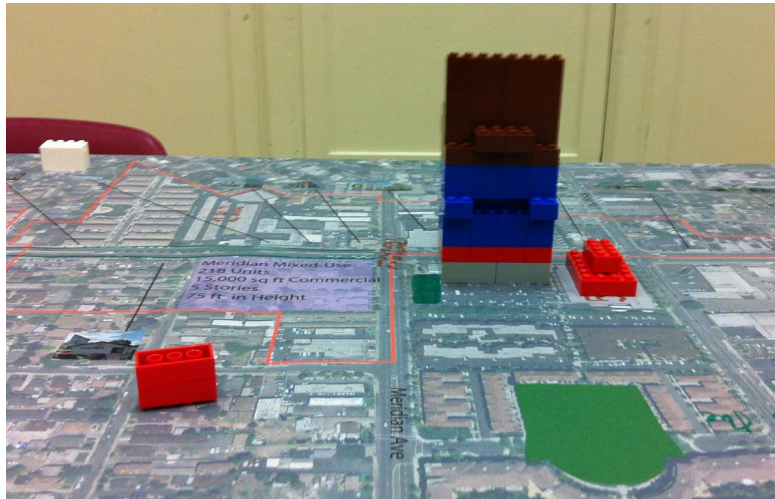
Visions:

- Leave it alone.
- Trees everywhere.
- 20 foot sidewalks.
- No blank walls fronting the street.
- Buildings with eyes on the street.
- Distinctive architectural blocks.
- Get rid of mini storage buildings.
- Free enterprise as driver for growth.

Exercise:

- Return businesses to the neighborhood.
- Redesign the Midtown Safeway.
- Meridian and West San Carlos could be a protected intersection.
- Move mini storage to North 1st street.
- Transform underutilized lots on east side of South Buena Vista into community gardens and a park.





Growth Strategy:

Table #2 had a very imaginative redesign of the Urban Village focused in two main hubs of development on the corridor. The group's first node of development was the intersection of West San Carlos and Bascom. At this intersection, the group built a large mixed use development that incorporated all of the land uses in a very creative design. On the site Business Circle site, the group chose created mid-rise office towers oriented to preserve the circular street pattern with parks and open spaces between the buildings. On the opposite side of Bascom, on the former Babyland site, the group placed retail uses. The node is primarily dedicated to retail and office space but there are some residential buildings at the periphery of the node. Other notable design features that the group envisions at the intersection are roof-top parks and bridges of retail development over South Bascom.

The other node that the group identified was the current Midtown Safeway site. Although this area is not within the current Urban Village boundary, primarily because there is an existing specific plan for this area, the group made it evident that they think this site could be improved upon through redevelopment. On this particular site, this group built a tower that contained a number of uses: parking on the ground floor, retail above, then a significant amount of office space and finally, at the very top of the tower, a number of floors of residential. Beside this large tower the group built a smaller, two story, retail structure where the Midtown Safeway currently stands.

Along West San Carlos, between the two nodes that the group identified, the group envisioned development in mid-rise residential buildings intermixed with small retail spaces, small parking structures.

Table #3

Assets:

- Grittiness of the streetscape (some not in agreement with this).
- Buildings that front the street. .
- Multiple points for pedestrian access.
- Density.
- Connectivity to other areas of San Jose.

Opportunities:

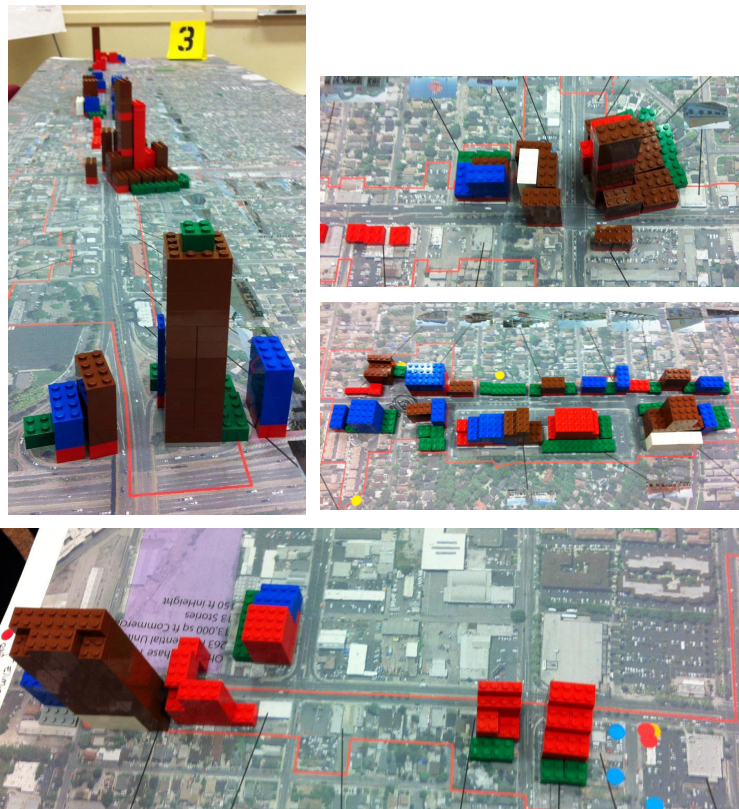
- Wider sidewalks.
- More parking.
- Replace car lots with other uses.
- The Business Circle strip mall currently has a low revenue potential but this space could have much more potential.
- The location is desirable (Bus Rapid Transit).
- A bus rapid transit stop is needed at Buena Vista.
- More trees needed but not palm trees.
- Midtown Safeway should be included in the planning area.

Heights:

- Buildings should be higher on the south side of San Carlos.
- Buildings should be no more than two stories if they are adjacent to a single family home.
- There should be a transition zone between the commercial uses and the residential properties.

Exercise:

- There is a need for retail and offices.
- More residential uses is not desirable unless rapid transit is incorporated.
- There should be nodes of development: Near Valley Fair Mall, West San Carlos and Bascom, near Ohlone.
- There should be a BRT stop at West San Carlos and Buena Vista.
- Redevelopment opportunities:
 - o Businesses Circle strip mall.
 - o The lot behind Western Appliance.
 - o The Cash and Carry Center has a lot of parking but not a lot of retail tax base.
- Parks:
 - o At the corner of Race and Park.
 - o The lot adjacent to the pocket park at the corner of Menker Avenue and Scott Street.



Growth Strategy:

Table #3's growth strategy focused on three nodes of development: the intersection of West San Carlo and Bascom, across from the proposed Ohlone development and the area adjacent to Highway 17. The group chose to focus most of their development in these areas in the form of tall mixed-use buildings. They designed the node at the intersection of West San Carlos and Bascom to be mainly residential with some office space and retail development sparingly intermixed within the development. This group also included a parking garage amongst the residential buildings and a park between the new development and the existing single family residences.

The second node of development that the group identified is the land adjacent to Highway 17. In this area the group built a tall residential tower with a park on the roof and another park adjacent to the building. Beside the residential tower, the group also created an office building with ground floor retail. The group also added two smaller building across the street from the taller residential building that contains ground floor retail, office space and more residential space.

The third node, located across the street from the proposed Ohlone development, is another residential tower. On either side of the tower the group created smaller buildings, one containing office space, and the other containing retail.

Along the corridor, between the nodes of development, the group added a number of mid-rise mixed-use buildings that contained office space, retail and residential in no particular pattern. The group chose to place parks and open space as buffers between these developments along the main stretch of West San Carlos, and the existing single family residential behind it.

Table #4

Assets:

- It's important to link transit with Transit Oriented Development.
- There is a question of how to beautify areas but keep the use. Use vs. Structure.
- The Falafel Drive-in and Time Deli buildings and businesses.
- Western Appliance (neutral).

Opportunities:

- Burbank Theater could be transformed into a movie theater and a pub/food/micro-brewery.
- Used car lots and rundown buildings could be turned into other uses.
- The Pink Poodle.
- Bascom and West San Carlos is the “problem” but also an important opportunity area.
- Need to connect/relate Western end of village across the 880 freeway to Steven's Creek.
- Midtown Safeway should be incorporated into the planning area.
- Ironworks at Pacific and West San Carlos is an opportunity site for redevelopment.

Heights:

- There should be greater heights/densities at the BRT stops.

Boundaries:

- The Bascom boundary should be extended north to Naglee.

Exercise:

- The team could add more Lego in the middle for more continuous development.
- BRT stop at West San Carlos and Bascom.





Growth Strategy:

Table #4 chose to make their development very mixed use in nature. Almost all of the buildings this group constructed have more than one use, with retail or offices on the ground floor and residential above. The one exception to this is the large parking structure that the group located on the Midtown Safeway site. Like some of the other groups, this group altered the boundaries to include the Midtown Safeway site.

Although this group created some nodes of development in the areas that the other groups identified, such as the intersection of West San Carlos and Bascom, these nodes are not as pronounced in this growth strategy. Around the intersection of West San Carlo and Bascom the group created midrise residential buildings with ground floor retail or office space. Around these developments the group also placed some parks and surface parking.

The second and more pronounced node that this group created was around the Midtown Safeway site. On this site the group built a higher concentration of mixed-use building. Most of the buildings consist of ground floor retail with the exception of two building containing only retail and commercial with roof top open space on the northwest corner of the intersection of West San Carlos and Meridian. The group added parking to this area in the form of ground floor parking and some larger parking structures.

Along the corridor between to the two identified nodes, the group created consistent midrise developments with ground floor retail and residential above. Small parks and open spaces are scattered throughout the development.

Table #8

Assets:

- Mel Cotton.
- Antique Colony.
- Western Appliance.
- "Time" Clock.
- "Pro Stop".
- O.C McDonald Arch..
- Babyland.
- Burbank Theater Sign.
- Native Garden-County: could be inspiration for future green space.

Opportunities:

- The entire corridor between Bascom and Meridian.
- The intersection at West San Carlos and Bascom.
- Used Car Lots “narrow” and may require additional width/depth from San Carlos on South Side.
- Art Wall.
- Farmer’s market spaces.

Future Vision:

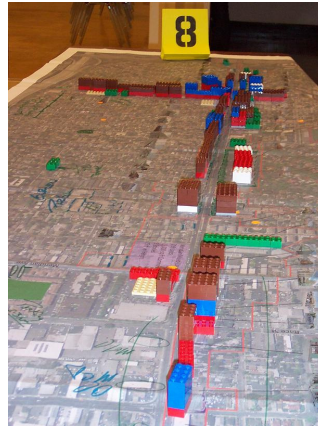
- There should be a limit to the number of chain stores on the corridor.
- When designing new buildings take shade into consideration.
- Taller buildings built in broader areas.
- Comparison to Santa Row.
- Old World/European feel.
- Art Walls and fountains.
- Community Gardens.

Land Use:

- Integrity with buffer (neighborhoods).
- Civic/jobs “centre” at West San Carlos and Bascom. Near the hospital and the transit center.
- A more pedestrian oriented street with places to stop and enjoy.
- Keep highlights of past (signs) and the theme of the neighborhood (40s and 50s but in the current century).

Exercise:

- Save the Babyland building. Make it into a diner or a 50/60s style burger shop.
- Clean up antique colony.
- Community garden at Scott St. and South Bascom.
- Save the bar in the Cash and Carry mall.
- A park at Scott St. and Wabash.
- A chain of planted roundabouts on Clifton Avenue.
- Complete the planned park at Scott Street and Mayellen Ave.
- Create access to the Grocery store on Parkmoor Ave. from the Buena Vista neighborhood.
- Develop a park in the vacant lot on Willard.
- Trees should be planted along West San Carlos.
- 2 to 3 hour limit to parking near Saddle Rack, not 24 hours.



Growth Strategy:

The growth strategy that Table #8 proposed involved a lot of development throughout the corridor with more intense development occurring at the intersection of West San Carlo and Bascom. At this intersection the group created a commercial node with retail uses on the ground floor and office space above. On the periphery of the node, and south along South Bascom, the group created mixed-use midrise building with ground floor retail and residential units above. In the center of the node, at West San Carlos and Bascom, the group proposed open space.

Along the corridor, the predominant type of development was mixed-use midrise building with ground floor retail and residential above with one mainly retail building built between two parking structures in the middle of the corridor. This group chose to include a number of parks and open spaces scattered throughout the development and used as a buffer between new developments and the existing single-family residences.